

PREDICTING A NEW PARADIGM

In my seven plus years of blogging, I've never done year-end reviews or predictions and I don't intend to start now.

But I do want to point to two pieces taking stock of this moment in history—the AJE piece on the decline of the American empire above (the transcript is [here](#)), and Juan Cole's piece declaring the end to US hyperpower.

The AJE piece is generalized and describes a decline in both our economic and military hegemony. And while Cole includes this generalized framework,

The end of the Cold War, which had stretched from 1946 to 1991, had left the political elites of the United States and Western Europe without a bogeyman or security threat on which they could run for office and through which they could funnel resources to the military-industrial complex that largely pays for their political campaigns. With Russia in steep decline in the 1990s and China still run as a small, cautious power, the US emerged as what the French called a Hyperpower, the sole superpower. US hawks were impatient that Bill Clinton seemed not to realize that he had complete freedom of movement for a brief window of time. It was the new US status of hyperpower that allowed the G. W. Bush administration to respond to the September 11 terrorist attacks by launching two major wars and a host of smaller struggles, all against targets in the Muslim world.

As of 2011, the age of the US hyperpower is passing, along with the possibilities for American wars of choice, i.e., wars of aggression.

He situates it, not surprisingly, in the Middle East.

Some years are pivotal and serve to mark off eras of history. 2011 saw the end of American hyperpower, and it announced the end of a decade of US-Muslim conflict that began with 2001. It saw the killing of Usama Bin Laden, the virtual rolling up of al-Qaeda, the repudiation of al-Qaeda's methods by the masses of the Arab world, and the US military withdrawal from Iraq. The upheavals of the Arab Spring and subsequent elections have led to Muslim fundamentalist parties being drawn into parliamentary politics on a Westminster model, rather than remaining sect-like corporate groups outside the body politic.

While I'm not certain that, fifty years from today, 2011—and specifically our withdrawal from Iraq—will mark the end of our hyperpower or empire (we might measure that date from the financial crisis in 2008; there might be some more spectacular loss in the future that will have that symbolism; or it could be something else entirely), I do generally agree that we're at the twilight of the American mode of power that has dominated since the end of World War II.

I think that's why predictions looking forward will be so hard to get right. Partly because there's no telling how Americans—both those who run our domestic and foreign policy, and those average citizens facing a future without the self-importance derived from the country's dominance—will react as this new state of affairs becomes evident. At both levels, we could just get a whole lot more violent.

But also because, as Tom Englehardt says in the AJE piece, I don't think we're seeing a simple matter of imperial succession, as happened when England passed the baton of world hegemon to us.

I don't think it's like the US is going down and you're gonna get a Chinese empire rising. I think you've got a planet in crisis and we're just barely beginning to feel it.

Rather, I think we're going to see a new paradigm, one that not only robs average Americans of the arrogance of being the "best," but also robs many around the world of their traditional means of understanding the world.

So while it may be interesting to think about President Obama dealing with a Republican Senate or President Mitt dealing with Speaker Pelosi, while it may be interesting to predict how many TBTF banks will fail over the next year, even while it may be interesting to start thinking about what Europe will look like after the Euro zone ends, I think all those exercises might be end up showing far too little imagination about what the future holds.

As I've said before, it's fairly clear that 2011—like 1968 and 1989—was a year of great historical importance. But I'm not sure if we can even conceive of just how important it might be or why.

IN EGYPT, OUR MILITARY SURROGATES CRACK DOWN ON OUR CIVIL SOCIETY SURROGATES

Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces raided 17 civil society and human rights groups yesterday, in some cases holding staffers at the NGO offices as the raid proceeded. The raid has the odd effect of pitting the Generals we've mentored and funded—to the tune of

billions—against civil society experts we’ve also funded, through State Department funding streams.

The orchestrated move by Egypt’s generals, apparently keen to play up to anti-US and nationalist feelings in the country, will be seen as highly provocative in Washington, which underwrites military aid to Egypt to the sum of \$1.3bn (£843m) annually.

“We are deeply concerned,” a State Department official told the Guardian.

And I suspect this won’t be the end of the demonizing of civil society NGOs. After all, these NGOs have been involved, for years, in training some of the activists who went on to lead the revolution. Even some of the activists (who may have been state operatives) have accused those with ties to these NGOs of “treason.” The State Department developed an explicit plan to foster reform in Egypt through these NGOs five years ago.

Technical support to legal political parties through IRI and NDI: Having assessed the elections, the institutes now recognize what the parties need. The NDP will likely not participate with other parties in the room, so it may be necessary to develop separate tracks in the program for the ruling party and the opposition. Even with the NDP on board, we can expect blowback by anti-reform elements. The institutes should keep their programs low-key and the USG apprised. Their programs should incorporate the full range of Egypt’s civil rights priorities, such as bringing more women and Christians into the political process. The 2007 Shura elections and the 2008 local council elections—and the development of the legislation promised to reform the later—will be the key medium-term tests.

In addition to continued support for international implementers like NDI and IRI, we should also proceed with supporting additional engagement on Egypt by additional international NGOs such as Transparency International, Freedom House, and the American Bar Association.

So SCAF will presumably find plenty of “evidence” that the US supported democratic reform, in part, by supporting these organizations (though State has been pressuring the government directly as well, both under Mubarak and since).

And all that’s before you consider the past role that the International Republican Institute has had in regime change efforts like the attempted 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez and the 2004 ouster of Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The point is not that our support of these NGOs is wrong (specific qualms about IRI and, to a lesser degree, Freedom House aside). Rather, it’s that the military leaders we’ve been sponsoring for years cannot distinguish between support for democratization and opposition to their rule. And that, in turn, can easily be spun as an opposition to Egyptian security, particularly given how much the US has turned Islamic terrorism into an all-powerful bogeyman.

It all seems so familiar, given our difficulty getting cooperation from our military surrogates in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, these very vivid examples of how paying to strengthen militarized authoritarians in “allied” countries can backfire didn’t stop us from finalizing a \$30 billion deal with Saudi Arabia for F-15s yesterday, the same day of this SCAF raid.

A RANCID FORECLOSURE FRAUD SETTLEMENT TRIAL BALLOON, HERBERT OBAMAVILLES, WHAT DIGBY SAID & THE IMPORT OF THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT

I do not usually just post simply to repeat what another somewhat similarly situated blogger has said. But late this afternoon/early this evening, I was struck by two things

almost simultaneously. Right as I read Gretchen Morgenson's latest article in the NYT on the latest and most refined parameters of the foreclosure fraud settlement, I also saw a post by Digby. The intersection of the two was crushing, but probably oh so true.

First, the latest Foreclosure Fraud Settlement trial balloon being floated by the "State Attorney Generals". There have been several such trial balloons floated on this before; all sunk like lead weights. This is absolutely a similar sack of shit; from Morgenson at the NYT:

Cutting to the chase: if you thought this was the deal that would hold banks accountable for filing phony documents in courts, foreclosing without showing

Don't go to work. Walk out of school. Say NO to Debt and Austerity!

**GENERAL
STRIKE!**
Resisted by the #occupyOakland General Assembly

November 2
For our dreams
For our community
For our collective future

strike. resist. occupy everything.

they had the legal right to do so and generally running roughshod over anyone who opposed them, you are likely to be disappointed.

This may not qualify as a shock. Accountability has been mostly A.W.O.L. in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. A handful of state attorneys general became so troubled by the direction this deal was taking that they dropped out of the talks. Officials from Delaware, New York, Massachusetts and Nevada feared that the settlement would preclude further investigations, and would wind up being a gift to the banks.

It looks as if they were right to worry. As things stand, the settlement, said to total about \$25 billion, would cost banks very little in actual cash – \$3.5 billion to \$5 billion. A dozen or so financial companies would contribute that money.

The rest – an estimated \$20 billion – would consist of credits to banks that agree to reduce a predetermined dollar amount of principal owed on mortgages that they own or service for private investors. How many credits would accrue to a bank is unclear, but the amount would be based on a formula agreed to by the negotiators. A bank that writes down a second lien, for example, would receive a different amount from one that writes down a first lien.

Sure, \$5 billion in cash isn't nada. But government officials have held out this deal as the penalty for years of what they saw as unlawful foreclosure practices. A few billion spread among a dozen or so institutions wouldn't seem a heavy burden, especially when considering the harm that was done.

The banks contend that they have seen no

evidence that they evicted homeowners who were paying their mortgages. Then again, state and federal officials conducted few, if any, in-depth investigations before sitting down to cut a deal.

Shaun Donovan, secretary of Housing and Urban Development, said the settlement, which is still being worked out, would hold banks accountable. "We continue to make progress toward the key goals of the settlement, which are to establish strong protections for homeowners in the way their loans are serviced across every type of loan and to ensure real relief for homeowners, including the most substantial principal writedown that has occurred throughout this crisis."

Read the full piece, there is much more there.

Yes, this is certainly just a trial balloon, and just the latest one at that. But it is infuriating, because it is the same old sell out crap repackaged and trying to be shoved down the public's throat yet again. And who wants to sell this shit sandwich the most? Barack Obama and his band of Masters of the Universe, that's who. It is also, of course, the fervent desire of Wall Street and their bought and paid for pols like Chuck Schumer.

Which is exactly why elected state Attorney General politicians (Hi Tom Miller), who are also generally on the political make, are so focused on getting a craven deal done, no matter how badly it screws the public and economy. If anybody has ever had any doubt as to why California AG Kamala Harris has been so slow, and so weak, in the matter this is exactly why. Harris is a political climber, and her fortunes and fame ride with the 1% and the politicians like Obama and Schumer that they control like circus monkeys.

Which brings me back to what Digby said. Digby, playing a notably tin-eared editorial by the Los Angeles Times off of a scathing comment on the American elite by Frank Rich, said:

That the LA Times is clutching its pearls over fig trees and grass while nearly 3,000 people have been arrested at Occupations all over the country world says just about everything you need to know about disconnect between elites and everybody else.

Yeah, that about sums it up. Do go read the full description of the “Hooverilles” and what they really comprised, because it is far too close to home with the current time and place we occupy. By the same token, it is hard for many in the comfortably ensconced traditional middle class to see just how heinous the situation is, and how necessary the “Occupy” movement may really be.

Trust me. I know, I am one of the uncomfortable. My natural predilections are within the system and rules. That, however, is no longer perhaps enough. Many of you reading this post may not be on Twitter, and thus may not have seen it; but I have in the last couple of days straightened out more than one pundit on the, and sometimes unfortunately so, real protection reach of the 1st Amendment. It is far less a prophylactic protection than most, and certainly the vocal proponents of the Occupy Movement, think.

Without belaboring the minutiae, the clear law of the land for over 70 years, ever since the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Cox v. New Hampshire*, is:

Civil liberties, as guaranteed by the Constitution, imply the existence of an organized society maintaining public order without which liberty itself would be lost in the excesses of unrestrained abuses. The authority of a municipality to impose regulations in order to assure

the safety and convenience of the people in the use of public highways has never been regarded as inconsistent with civil liberties but rather as one of the means of safeguarding the good order upon which they ultimately depend.

....

If a municipality has authority to control the use of its public streets for parades or processions, as it undoubtedly has, it cannot be denied authority to give consideration, without unfair discrimination, to time, place and manner in relation to the other proper uses of the streets. We find it impossible to say that the limited authority conferred by the licensing provisions of the statute in question as thus construed by the state court contravened any constitutional right.

There is a long line of cases that ultimately extend the ability of cities and municipalities right to reasonably regulate time and place of free speech expression, so long as said regulation is content neutral, to public parks and all other sorts of publicly controlled spaces.

But those are "the rules". When the politicians and corporate masters no longer are willing to play by the rules, how much longer can the "99%" afford to honor them? When the so called leaders will not abide by the norms and constricts of law, why should the average man still be held to the same?

Again, I fully admit just how much I struggle with saying the above. I really do; it is uncomfortable and discomfiting. I could go on, but my own thoughts pale in comparison with those similarly situated who have experienced first hand what the import and truth of the Occupy movement is.

I ask, indeed implore, you read this long, but telling, account from The Awl by Lili Loofbourow

entitled *"The Livestream Ended: How I Got Off My Computer And Onto The Street At Occupy Oakland"*. There is literally too much to excerpt, and it would take away from the critically important slow progression the writer lays out for you, the reader.

So, while "the rules" may militate otherwise, and while "our Constitutional rights" go nowhere near as far as the psyched up Occupiers cry, there is something raw and necessary about the "Occupy" movement. It is necessary because the rules and "adults in the room" have sold their souls, and our lives, down the river of greed.

If not "the 99%", then who? If not now, then when? It is time.

BLOOMBERG AVERTS ZUCCOTTI PARK SHOWDOWN AS OCCUPY WALL STREET GOES GLOBAL

At the end of the day yesterday, the burning question was whether New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg would send the New York Police Department into Zuccotti Park this morning to clear it of protesters under cover of a request from the owners of the property (although used as a public park, the property is privately owned). This morning, we learn that the property owners and Bloomberg have backed down, postponing for now the planned cleaning which had been put forward as the reason for potentially clearing the park. From CNN:

The New York mayor's office said Brookfield Properties, the owners of Zuccotti Park, told the city late

Thursday the scheduled cleaning is off for now and “for the time being” they are “withdrawing their request” made earlier in the week for police assistance during the cleaning operation.

“Our position has been consistent throughout: the City’s role is to protect public health and safety, to enforce the law, and guarantee the rights of all New Yorkers. Brookfield believes they can work out an arrangement with the protesters that will ensure the park remains clean, safe, available for public use and that the situation is respectful of residents and businesses downtown, and we will continue to monitor the situation,” Deputy Mayor Cas Holloway said.

There had been fears of a standoff between New York officers tasked with clearing the park early Friday and protesters who wouldn’t budge. The city had ordered the protesters to leave by 7 a.m. so crews could clean the park.

But the protesters mopped, collected trash and scrubbed the pavement in the dead of the night as the Friday deadline neared for them to leave the premises for a cleanup. When the word of the postponed cleaning filtered through the more than 1,000 protesters who filled the park, they were elated.

What began about a month ago with a handful of protesters in New York City is now spreading across the globe:

The Occupy Wall Street movement has sparked nationwide protests in more than 1,400 cities, according to Occupy Together, which has become an online hub for protest activity.

It also inspired solidarity rallies on

Thursday that were due to take place at more than 140 U.S. college campuses in 25 states, according to Occupy Colleges. Some social media photos showed about a dozen or so protesters at various colleges.

According to the website of United for Global Change, 15october.net/, there are 869 cities in 71 countries where protests are being planning.[sic]

Even here in lowly Gainesville, a small blue dot in the middle of the reddest portion of Florida, the occupy movement is alive. A permit was granted for protesters to sleep overnight in the downtown Bo Diddley Plaza Wednesday night, but protesters attempted to stay overnight Thursday night as well, leading to the arrest of Bo Diddley's son, Ellas McDaniel:

Ellas Anthony McDaniel, 56, said he was charged with trespassing around midnight Thursday because he refused to leave the Bo Diddley community plaza after it closed as is customary at 11:30 p.m. McDaniel said he complained to police that he had not been read his Miranda rights.

"They said if I go back in there, I'll be arrested," McDaniel said. "I'm not a vagrant. My father wasn't a vagrant. If he was a vagrant, they wouldn't have named this park after him. He didn't raise no vagrants. He raised men. He raised me to stand up for what I believe, because he stood up for what he believed."

The arrests in Gainesville do not stand alone.

Cities across the US have varied widely in their responses to the protests, with some large scale arrests (hundreds were arrested as they took to the Brooklyn Bridge) and some cities, such as Los Angeles, working closely with

protesters to assure peaceful protests with few to no arrests.

With the large number of protests planned around the world for tomorrow, this weekend should tell us just how much momentum the movement is gaining. One of the primary reasons Brookfield Properties and Mayor Bloomberg (whose girlfriend is on the board of Brookfield) may have backed down from a confrontation today is that there was a growing belief that there is now sufficient attention on the protest that a major crackdown would lead to a huge outpouring of support for the movement with overwhelming numbers of people joining the protesters on the streets. At the time of this writing, unconfirmed reports on Twitter indicate a significant police presence around Zuccotti Park and a few reports of individual arrests, but no massive police action appears imminent.

If there are indeed over 1400 different protests in the US tomorrow and nearly 900 more in international cities, it is clear that the protests are striking a nerve across the globe.

Although some attack the movement as lacking a clear purpose or set of demands, it seems to me that the resonant theme is that Wall Street represents the hub of a system which for too long has enriched a very few while relying on lax regulation, poor law enforcement and a purchased government to deprive everyone else of their resources and their opportunities. This movement represents a growing awareness among the "99%" that this situation is no longer sustainable.

How far will the movement go and does it have the potential to lead to real change? Only time will tell, but if the movement maintains anything like its current momentum for a few more weeks, the possibility begins to look more like a probability.

F1 TRASH: BERNIE ECCLESTONE TAKES A SWING AT SULTANS OF BAHRAIN

Bernie yanks the Bahraini GP and Vettel looks on track for another win in Montreal.

EGYPTIAN TRASH TALK

Time to get the lead out and get America's youth into an American Tahrir Square because the United States needs a revolution as much as anywhere in the world right now. Time for some real hope and change instead of the disingenuous drivel we were conned with in 2008.